

What is Bullying?

Bullying is an interaction between people with **unequal power or status** with the **intent** to humiliate or physically injure an individual. It can be a single incident or an ongoing pattern of behavior. It can occur between children and/or adults. Bullying is **NOT** a childhood rite of passage.

Bullying takes many forms, and can be:

- **Physical:** Kicking, hitting, hair pulling, tripping, pushing or threatening physical harm. More subtle forms of physical bullying include intimidation through glares or “stare-downs.” Extortion, stealing money and destroying possessions are also forms of physical bullying.
- **Verbal:** Name calling, spreading gossip/rumors, teasing, put-downs, and slurs based on race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Verbal attacks may be direct or occur through written notes, graffiti, text messaging, or the internet.
- **Emotional:** Deliberate exclusion from peer group, snubbing, manipulation of friendships, humiliation.

The implied messages when bullying is not addressed are that:

- Some people do not deserve to be treated with kindness
- Some people have the right to be cruel

Some Facts on Bullying:

- **30%** of 6th – 10th graders reported moderate to frequent involvement with bullying as the bully, victim or both.
- Nationally it is estimated that **160,000 students a day** stay home from school due to bullying
- Bullies identified at age 8 are six times more likely to have a criminal conviction by age 24.
- Targets of bullying experience increased rates of depression, even into adulthood.

When A Child is a Target of Bullying

What we know:

Research shows that on any given school day, approximately 160,000 children decide to skip school to avoid being picked on or bullied by their peers. The numbers of children who suffer in silence is even higher.

Warning signs:

- Frightened walking or taking bus to school
- Unwilling to go to school
- Ill in morning and/or frequent contact with the school nurse
- Come home with clothes, books, other belongings destroyed
- Come home hungry
- Possessions missing, losing money
- Behavior change – withdrawn, drop in grades, aggressive
- Unexplained bruises, cuts
- Begin to bully siblings, other children
- Improbable excuses for any of above

What parents can do:

- If you suspect your child is being bullied, ASK.
Some questions to start the conversation include:
 - “Who do you sit with at lunch? What is lunch time like at your school?”
 - “What is it like walking to school/taking the bus?”
 - “Are there people at school/neighborhood/sport team who are bullies?”
 - Do kids ever call you mean names...bullied you by hitting or pushing?
- Listen
- Stay calm!
- Take it seriously
- Let your child that it is not his or her fault
- Review options to address bullying with child
- Talk with school personnel
- Keep records of incidents
- Help child practice strategies – encourage independence while offering support
- Help develop new friendships
- Provide opportunities to boost self-esteem

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Assessment and Intervention for Victims of Childhood Bullying Steps for Practitioners

- 1) Collect information from the child and/or family:
 - a) Where did the bullying occur?
 - b) When does the bullying occur and at what frequency, when did it start?
 - c) Who does the bullying; is it more than one person and who is/are the targets?
 - d) What exactly happens?
 - Harassment, sexual or other
 - Intimidation or threats
 - Physical or verbal aggression
 - Stolen or damage to property
 - Teasing, making fun of target
 - “Deliberate ignoring”, snubbing, exclusion
- 2) What has the victim done about it so far, or if nothing, why not? (i.e. fear, embarrassment, not know who to tell, feels no one will help/care)
- 3) Collect information from staff/adults in the setting in which the bullying occurs (school, bus, camp, daycare, another child’s home):
 - a) Find out the impressions of the adults in the situation, and what if anything has been tried so far. How can they be called for assistance when there is a problem?
 - b) What programs are available at the setting that can be put in place such as: peer mediation, counseling, anti-bullying program, mentoring or “natural helper” programs, anonymous suggestion or reporting box, identified staff to contact etc.

- 4) Formulate the victim's needs:
 - a) Individual needs: skills training such as assertiveness training, conflict resolution, safety awareness (what and how some situations might be avoided), who/how to contact for help
 - b) Environmental/cultural changes: setting up programs to deal with bullying such as mentoring, student helpers, anonymous bullying reporting system, setting up a culture that does not reinforce bullying, teaching bullies to recognize their behavior and learn other strategies, consequences for bullying, additional supervision in high-risk areas of adults who have been trained in identifying and dealing with bullying
- 5) As appropriate, have parents be involved in the planning, implementation and assessment of the program.
 - a) Parents need a contact person to include their observations and feedback.
- 6) Set up a way to evaluate the success of the intervention
 - a) Keep track of what strategies have been helpful; if there are difference between boys and girls, different age students, which settings favor which interventions.

Bullying Prevention: **What School Staff Can Do to Help**

BE ALERT!

- **Break the code of silence:**
When we remain silent about bullying we send the message that some people do not deserve to be treated with kindness and that some people have the right to be cruel. The first step is to be willing to acknowledge that bullying exists and then to state through words and action that bullying will not be tolerated.
- **Enforce rules consistently:**
Rules enforced consistently are more effective than severe rules. Consistency helps to establish expectations about behavior and conduct. Consistent enforcement also sends the message that the rules apply to everyone, eliminating any perception of favoritism which can reinforce bullying.
- **Act immediately:**
Intervention can be most effective in the moment. When action is taken, the message is clear to the target, the bully and bystanders that cruelty towards others will not be tolerated. The best way to be ready to act is to be visible in the "hot spots" (i.e., hallways, cafeteria, playground)

- **Listen:**
Tune in and listen to what is being said around you through the course of the school day. With greater awareness, you are more likely to catch the name calling, verbal threats, and rumors allowing for better response.

Also be ready to listen when a student comes to you as a target of bullying or to report bullying. It is important to validate their feelings and experience.

- **Empower victims and bystanders:**
Encourage students to take a stand against bullying and support those who do. Use teachable moments to model effective strategies to intervene and respond to bullying. Actively involve students in planning around school response to bullying prevention.
- **Refer for additional services:**
If a student who has been targeted appears depressed or anxious, mental health services may be indicated. Students who engage in bullying behavior may also benefit from services. Any youth indicating thoughts of hurting themselves or others can be referred to the Rochester Community Mobile Crisis Team at 275-5151 for assessment.
- **Take it seriously:**
The costs of cruelty are high for the entire school community. Bullying compromises the learning environment for all and the long-term consequences for targets and bullies can be devastating.

“What has worked for me this year is keeping a paper trail on a bully’s many contacts with students. This has given 2 victims the opportunity to be believed. They (and I) have been trying for 2 years to mediate and have parent meetings regarding the bully’s behavior. Now that mediations have not helped and parental support is lacking, the paper trail is evidence that the victims and the school have tried all we can. Finally, the bully was given a warning of transfer out of our building if she does one more bullying act against the victims or any new victims. Her mother was also warned of legal action if bullying does not stop. It took a paper trail (well kept written records of each and every attempt to resolve the issue and change the behavior) of evidence to finally get some help for the victims. My 2 victims showed remarkable restraint in letting the adults handle the issue, even though it took over a year for their relief.”

Mary Gagliano
School Counselor